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CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 19 March 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Abuah (Nigeria)

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The PRESIDENT: I call to order the 730th meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Today, Nigeria assumes the presidency of this Conference. This event is an honour for me and my country. Throughout our history as a nation, we have contributed to the promotion of cherished ideals of international peace and security. In Africa and in the wider world, our record is ample and recognized. Our effective participation in the Conference on Disarmament and constructive advocacy for all forms of disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, clearly reflect the consistency of our national policy.

In approximately three weeks, Nigeria will join other African countries in Cairo to sign the treaty establishing the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (Pelindaba Treaty). The treaty is Africa's contribution to non-proliferation. Let me observe that the distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, was one of the architects of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone. This is why I am delighted that here today, in this Council chamber, the Conference on Disarmament is very pleased to welcome, in our midst, His Excellency Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Conference was privileged to receive him last July. That he can spare some of his valuable time to share with us his thoughts, and to offer his wise counsel about the imperatives of making our world safer and more secure, stress once again the internationally held view that we in the Conference on Disarmament should persevere, in spite of all difficulties, to conclude our negotiations for a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty by June 1996.

I now give the floor to the distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Mr. BOUTROS-GHALI (Secretary-General of the United Nations): Let me congratulate you for your presidency, and allow me to speak in French.

(continued in French)

I should like, first, to express my sincere gratitude to you for organizing this special meeting of the Conference which has allowed me to join you. I fully realize that, given the ongoing negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, your Conference has a very busy schedule. That is precisely why I decided to speak to you today. I want to tell you with the utmost solemnity how much importance I attach to the success of these negotiations.

In my message to you at the start of your annual session, as your President has stressed, I emphasized that nothing should divert you from your goal, and that it was imperative to conclude a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty by June 1996.

The first part of your annual session will close at the end of this month. My message has not changed. It has even acquired renewed urgency. It is essential that you go beyond certain differences of opinion, however great

they may be. For we must seize this opportunity to bring to a conclusion more than 30 years of effort directed at ensuring that all nuclear testing will be banned by international law.

The Conference on Disarmament has demonstrated in the past that it could tackle with determination the political and legal challenges and technical difficulties associated with negotiating a treaty of international significance. It demonstrated this again quite recently with the negotiation of the Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons. On that occasion it clearly showed itself to be equal to its task as the sole body for multilateral negotiation in the field of disarmament. I am certain that today, you will make further progress along this path.

For the first time since consideration of a nuclear test ban began in 1962, all the major protagonists - including the five nuclear Powers - are actively involved in the negotiations. And everyone is convinced that the Conference is the only forum within which such negotiations can be conducted. Indeed, the political and geographical balance of its membership, and the special arrangements which have been made to allow more than 50 non-member States to participate in it, make the Conference a forum for negotiation that is unique of its kind and guarantees that all viewpoints will be heard.

But flexibility and the political will to achieve compromise will be essential. It is this above all that I wish to emphasize today. For there is no time to lose. Today we know that the opportunity is there and that we must seize it. During the first 50 years of its existence, the United Nations appealed to the nuclear Powers to desist from their frantic competition to produce ever more powerful and ever more sophisticated nuclear weapons, and called upon them to start reducing their immense arsenals, rather than increasing them. At the same time, great efforts were being made to prevent those weapons from proliferating throughout the planet.

Today, with the end of the cold war, great progress has been made in the field of nuclear disarmament. Henceforth, the two major nuclear States are no longer aiming strategic missiles at each other. The United States and the Russian Federation, responding to the pleas of the world's peoples, have embarked on a process of real nuclear disarmament. Today, we no longer live in a world haunted by the terror of an atomic war. The majority of the nuclear Powers have abandoned the practice of nuclear tests.

For the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, we can hold a real discussion on the progressive reduction of nuclear arms, pending the complete and total elimination of such weapons. The goal is no longer to manufacture more weapons, but to reduce their numbers with a view to their elimination.

The comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty would be an additional means to enshrine the end of the cold war in positive international law. It would give new impetus to nuclear disarmament, and would make an invaluable contribution to the non-proliferation regime. It would also constitute an impediment to all qualitative development of nuclear weapons, since perfecting new nuclear weapons presupposes the carrying out of further nuclear tests. A comprehensive test ban should prevent States from developing such new weapons.

(Mr. Boutros-Ghali, Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Today, the international community clearly recognizes that nuclear disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons are in the interests of all States, whether or not they have such weapons. This was affirmed by the 175 States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons when they took the major decision to make the Treaty not only a permanent expression of their commitment to non-proliferation, but also proof of their resolve to adopt new nuclear disarmament measures "with determination", and to conclude a comprehensive test-ban treaty "no later than 1996". That decision gave rise to great hopes that the comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty would be rapidly concluded. Last December, the General Assembly of the United Nations reaffirmed that it considered this a priority, and requested your Conference to complete its work before its next session.

I have followed your work closely, and I am happy to see that the Conference has re-established the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. That has made it possible to extend the areas upon which consensus has been reached, to include new group proposals in the negotiations, and to give an impetus and a new focus to your work.

It is not for me to go into the details of your negotiations, but I wish to emphasize one issue which appears to me to be essential, concerning the scope of the future treaty. The considerable political progress made last year in this area must be consolidated. A broad consensus has already emerged on the proposal that all explosions, however small, must be banned. There can therefore be no acceptable threshold. This is a completely satisfactory development, and the international community expected nothing less. Everyone is aware of the special responsibility which the nuclear Powers have in this area. I therefore urge them in particular to ensure that the treaty really deserves its name - that it provides for a truly "comprehensive" ban on nuclear tests.

Today you have begun a race against time. The conclusion of the treaty cannot be deferred any longer. It must be concluded this year. Otherwise a severe blow will be dealt to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and thereby to peace and security as a whole. Once again, I ask you all, whether you represent a large country or a small country, a nuclear State or a non-nuclear State, to show flexibility, open-mindedness, a spirit of compromise and the will to succeed.

As for myself, I can assure you that despite the financial crisis I will do everything in my power to help you. As soon as the treaty is concluded, I will submit it to the General Assembly for signature. I shall also make sure that the United Nations helps prospective signatories of the treaty with the preparation for its implementation.

My duty today is therefore to urge you to succeed. The world is watching your negotiations! The entire international community looks to you to conclude this treaty! Do not underestimate the historic work upon which you are engaged on the difficult journey towards nuclear disarmament. Your success will represent a triumph for future generations, and for all humanity. You must succeed!

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Secretary-General for his important statement and for the encouraging words addressed to the Conference.

I should like to remind you that this plenary meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Friend of the Chair on On-site Inspection of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place on Thursday, 21 March 1996 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.